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THREE LETTERS,

BY

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Nec temerè nec timidè.

BRITISH MUSEUM

THREE LETTERS.

LETTER I.

To the ſeveral PATRIOTIC SOCIETIES *in London, and its Neighbourhood.*

GENTLEMEN,

AFFLICTED by the preſent diſtracted ſtate of my country, and ſtill more by the proſpect of thoſe horrors which ever accompany civil commotions, I take the liberty of requeſting your attention for a few moments.—The riotous diſpoſition which the loweſt claſſes of people diſcover in many places, but particularly in this metropolis, you can do more to appeaſe than all the troops which may be employed againſt them; and you will have the pleaſure to reflect that you have ſaved the lives perhaps of a great number of innocent, and infatuated perſons.

It is an ill-grounded accuſation againſt the multitude, that they will not liſten to the dictates of reaſon. They are to be calmed by ſober appeals to their underſtanding—force but increaſes their fury.

Theſe deluded rioters cry out for *Equality*, by which they mean that no one individual ſhall have a greater ſhare of property than another. Ought they not to be made ſenſible of the injuſtice of placing the idle and the induſtrious upon the ſame level, and of giving not only an *equal* but *any* ſhare of the fruits of virtuous labour to able but inactive and uſeleſs members of a community? Ought they not alſo to be told, that whilſt men have different talents, and different diſpoſitions, an inequality of property cannot but exiſt, that the ſcale muſt ſoon preponderate on one ſide or the other, that the equilibrium could not be preſerved for a moment.

Ought they not ſtill further to be reminded of the impropriety, and even impolicy, of the means by which they ſeek to attain ſo abſurd and wicked an object? They complain of Government, and yet by lawleſs violence

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would they themſelves govern. Ought they not to be told, that ſuch proceedings are unjuſtifiable in the extreme? Your Societies have, as I underſtand, for their principal object a reform of the repreſentation—Would it not be proper to tell theſe diſorderly perſons, that an application to the Legiſlature for this or any other meaſure ſo ſalutary, ſupported by the general ſenſe of the people, temperately expreſſed, can never fail of its effect? and might it not be added, that the will of a nation on *any point* may be declared in various peaceable methods, and cannot be reſiſted? Might it not be likewiſe ſtated to them, that the redreſs of every real grievance is by their conduct ſet at a greater diſtance—that many, who wiſh for reform in ſeveral particulars, are driven into aſſociations for preventing every kind of innovation, even though it appear to them an amendment, merely becauſe they will make head againſt ſuch boiſterous demands—that all the ſupporters of a well-ſecured and well-regulated liberty, who have been endeavouring to put the people in poſſeſſion of their juſt rights, muſt withdraw themſelves from them, until

they return to an orderly behaviour; and that it is the duty of every honeſt and induſtrious citizen, not only to lend no aſſiſtance to a lawleſs mob, but to attempt by every method of perſuaſion to divert them from their preſent deſign, and to convince them of the impropriety of their conduct, and of the ſad conſequences which attend a perſeverance in it.

Nothing is farther from my intention, Gentlemen, than to dictate to you in the preſent criſis. I ſubmit it to your judgment, whether an addreſs from your bodies, with a ſtatement ſomething ſimilar to what I have mentioned above, might not cauſe the prevailing diſpoſition to riot and inſurrection to ſubſide. At the ſame time that ſuch a meaſure, from the known friends of the people, is the moſt likely to calm the tumultuous, it will likewiſe guard yourſelves from every poſſible charge of fomenting ſedition. It has been more than hinted, unleſs I am greatly miſtaken, that the Patriotic Societies are for levelling property. By explaining yourſelves on this ſubject, you will confute the calumnies of miſrepreſentation, and diſpel the error of a deluded people.

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Let me intreat you, Gentlemen, to take into immediate conſideration the ſtep which I have now recommended. I offer you the ſentiments, I will dare to ſay, of an honeſt mind, neither influenced by a ſenſe of intereſt, nor attachment to party, nor fear of danger. I am ſtill an enemy to civil excluſion on account of religious or any other opinions. I am ſtill ready to promote any proper and peaceable ſcheme, for correcting the unfair and unequal repreſentation of the people, &c. &c.—but I am ſtill a friend to order, and to peace. When I was, without any previous ſolicitation on my part or even knowledge, elected an honorary Member of the Conſtitutional Society at Mancheſter, I promiſed, agreeably to their inſtitution, to forward the deſign of obtaining a more pure repreſentation, by every peaceable endeavour. In my tract on Hereſy, which is before the publick, I have held the ſame language. I now avow the ſame principles: The ſpirit of riot and inſurgency which has lately broken out, I will diſcountenance in every way which lies in my power; and I beſeech you, Gentlemen, in the ſtrongeſt manner,

manner, to employ your diligent exertions to awaken all thoſe whoſe minds are ſo greatly miſled, to a ſenſe of their duty as citizens—to a ſenſe of their true intereſt.

BENJ. HOBHOUSE.

London, Dec. 5, 1792.

To the EDITOR *of the* MORNING CHRONICLE.

LETTER II.

SIR,

A FEW weeks ago, my mind was ſenſibly affected with apprehenſions of an approaching civil war; but I thank Heaven, that there is now no ground for ſuch terrors, nor was there, perhaps, at that time, if all could have been known by us. My reflections now take another direction. I contemplate, with painful emotions, the precipitancy wich which the many ruſh to ſign declarations which they *cannot* have maturely weighed; but, above all, I am ſtruck with *horror*, when I conſider the caſe of many a conſcientious man, who cannot think that the

the preſent form of Government is beſt calculated for the happineſs of *all* claſſes of people. Permit me to repreſent to you a ſituation which is poſſibly true in more than one inſtance.

A gentleman, whoſe very maintenance, perhaps, is dependant upon public favour, is applied to for the purpoſe of ſigning a declaration, that he approves of a Government by King, Lords, and Commons.—He is told that " this our glorious Conſtitution, it is " the object of infatuated Republicans and " deſperate Levellers to ſubvert," and that againſt ſuch characters, all well-diſpoſed ſubjects ought to unite " for the preſervation " of liberty and property."

To this intreaty he objects, that the man, who wiſhes to ſee a Government, conſiſting of a fair and equal repreſentation of the people in one Aſſembly, over which none of the executive branches of Government ſhould have the leaſt controul, but each be accountable to it, and puniſhable for mal-adminiſtration or neglect, can never be looked upon as an enemy of liberty, but a defender of it;

inaſmuch

inaſmuch as he would have the people governed by no other laws than thoſe to which they have given their own conſent.

He further objects, that the favourer of ſuch a ſyſtem is not conſequently an approver of the wild and nonſenſical doctrine of equalized property, and that the Aſſociators have aſſociated ideas which do not neceſſarily co-exiſt. He adds alſo, that however much he may admire the true repreſentative Government, he would not like to ſee it introduced otherwiſe than peaceably, nor before the majority of his countrymen are convinced of its ſuperior wiſdom.

But all this reaſoning ſignifies nothing.—His fears for the ſafety of his property, and of himſelf and family, are raiſed by a ſtatement of the horrible conſequences of a perſevering refuſal to ſign the current political teſt. His livelihood is to be loſt by the loſs of his buſineſs; his houſe is to be deſtroyed; his wife and children are poſſibly to be involved in the ruin; and, what is perhaps, the leaſt conſideration to himſelf, his own life to be endangered.

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Let me aſk you, Sir, what is the advice which you would give to a perſon under ſuch diſtreſſing circumſtances? Would you not ſay, *I, bone, quo virtus tua te vocat?* The peace of your own mind ought ever to be the prevailing motive of your conduct; all worldly conſiderations ought to have no weight againſt it; compliances, dictated by fear, are incompatible with true magnanimity. Would you not further ſay to him, "The good ſenſe of your countrymen will "certainly be in time reſtored, and then they "will be perſuaded of the iniquity of ſuch "harſh treatment to a reſpectable and peace-"able citizen, who has no authority over his "own opinions, and who only contends for "the right of ſubmitting them, in a tempe-"rate manner, to the judgment of his fellow-"citizens?" Then will they be perſuaded, that by running from door to door with their declarations, and urging the ſignature of each individual, that they make particular perſons marks for the fury of the populace, and uſe arguments of terror to procure that teſtimony of approbation, which is only honourable as far as it is voluntary.

Dec. 23, 1792. CIVIS.

To the EDITOR *of the* MORNING CHRONICLE.

LETTER III.

SIR,

IN this critical juncture of affairs, it behoves the Proteſtant Diſſenters well to conſider what part they ought to act. They are accuſed of ſeditious diſpoſitions, and the people are taught to think that they are forming conſpiracies againſt the peace of the country. Hence the mob attempt to deſtroy their houſes, and do an injury to their perſons. They are likely to be conſiderable ſufferers *now*, as well as in the year 1791, in conſequence of the *lawleſs* methods in which it is thought proper to expreſs a loyalty to the *King*, and an attachment to the Government.

Is this charge of ſedition, Sir, againſt the Diſſenters, well founded? Certainly not. Did they bring before the Legiſlature their application for the repeal of the Teſt Laws, when the country was involved in danger? Can an inſtance be produced, in which they have committed

committed devaſtations upon the property of their countrymen, and endangered their lives? No, Sir, no ſuch reproach is to be fixed upon *them*; their conduct has been ſtrictly conformable to the laws.

But have they not inrolled themſelves in the Aſſociations for the Reform of Parliament, or in ſome Conſtitutional Society? Moſt aſſuredly they have. But where is the *criminality* of ſuch proceedings? Mr. REEVES* has told us, that ſuch aſſociations are *illegal*.† If ſo, how will he exempt his own from the ſame charge? He will tell us, perhaps, that his Aſſociation, and others of the ſame kind, are formed for the defence of our glorious Conſtitution; and might not the Aſſociated Reformers with equal ſincerity aſſert, that it

* Chairman of the firſt Aſſociation, "for preſerving Liberty and Property againſt Republicans and Levellers."

† The Lord-Mayor of London officially endeavoured to put an end to the meeting of Debating Societies. I heard it well obſerved, that, upon the ſame principle, he ſhould have tried to prevent the great body of merchants from aſſembling to take into conſideration the propriety of expreſſing at this time an attachment to the Conſtitution. It might have been reaſonably expected, that ſome debate would then take place. Has not this Magiſtrate gone farther than the law juſtifies? And what muſt we think of a menace, to take away the licences of publicans, who ſhall permit any political club to frequent their houſes?

is the object of their union to reſtore this ſame Conſtitution to its original purity, and perfect it according to its own principles? Is not the motive in the one caſe as commendable as in the other?

But have not the Diſſenters gloried in the French Revolution? Moſt certainly they have. And ſhall it be objected to *Engliſhmen*, that they have rejoiced on the downfal of the moſt ſhocking deſpotiſm, and the emancipation of twenty-five millions of men from the moſt abject ſlavery? To celebrate ſuch an happy event, is neither to expreſs an approbation of the meaſures of French patriots *in detail*, nor to recommend a Revolution in a country, *not* placed in ſuch circumſtances as France was under her *old* Government. I declare to you, Sir, that I can ſee nothing in the actions of Proteſtant Diſſenters, to juſtify the regarding them as ſeditious characters, who by violence would overturn the Britiſh Conſtitution. On the contrary, I believe it to be a fact, that very few of them diſapprove a Government by King, Lords, and Commons.

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For theſe reaſons, I muſt continue to think, that the ſuſpicion of their *diſaffection* has no other foundation, than in the knowledge that they have reaſon for diſſatisfaction.

I have been inſenſibly led to this vindication of the Proteſtant Diſſenters, although I had no other deſign in this letter, than to offer them a word of advice in the preſent poſture of affairs.

Many Diſſenters are marked objects at preſent, and it is not impoſſible that their houſes and perſons may be attacked. Let them prepare themſelves for a defence, and provide themſelves and ſervants with arms for that purpoſe.——Let them give notice to the neareſt Magiſtrate, that on the firſt alarm they ſhall ſend for him, and ſeek protection from the laws. If, however, outrageous proceedings ſhould commence before proper aſſiſtance can arrive, let them, with whatever reluctance it may be done, reſiſt the rioters, if there be a chance of diſperſing them. This the law warrants, and there is but one conſideration to withhold the uplifted arm, namely, how far it is right in a religious light,

light, to take away the life of another in defence of *property*. Each man muſt ſettle this in his own mind.

Let us now ſuppoſe that a real inſurrection, on any ground, took place in the kingdom—How is a Diſſenter to act? Shall he, who has debarred himſelf of public employments, and the pleaſure of being uſeful to the community, becauſe he will neither make an inſincere declaration, nor proſtitute a Chriſtian rite; ſhall he, for the ſake even of ſaving his country, if it were poſſible, become a hypocrite, and be guilty of profaning a ſacred ordinance? Heaven forbid! Or ſhall he defy the laws of his country, and truſt to its future clemency? No Diſſenter is juſtified in ſuch a ſtep; nor have thoſe, who would exclude him from offices in *tranquil* times, the leaſt right to expect his acceptance of them in ſeaſons of *peril*. Whatever may be the property he has at ſtake, he muſt, if he would be a good ſubject, lie inactive. He knows that he is prohibited by the laws of his country from aſſiſting in its defence; and that if he ſhould commit ſuch a crime, he is liable to 500l. penalty, and may become an outlaw.

outlaw. He knows that he is to be excluded from the protection of the law, for exerting himſelf to reduce others to an obedience to it.

After the rebellion of 1745, in which the Proteſtant Diſſenters diſplayed their attachment to the preſent family on the Throne, by raiſing independent regiments and companies, and accepting military commiſſions, without obſerving the requiſites of the Teſt Laws, a bill of indemnity was paſſed, to protect them againſt the penal conſequences of ſuch criminal loyalty. Be ye good ſubjects, I would ſay to the Proteſtant Diſſenters, commit not the leaſt breach of an Act of Parliament.

Such is the conduct which I would adviſe Diſſenters to follow, either in caſe of a perſonal attack from a mob, or in caſe of a general commotion. To ſuch counſel I would add, that in the mean time, they ought not to be intimidated from delivering their ſentiments on any public meaſures, nor from communicating information of exiſting abuſes to the people, nor from peaceable endeavours to effect their Reform.

The people ought not to be kept in the dark; but whilſt they are enlightened, it ſhould ever be held out to them, that in ſeeking redreſs againſt whatever they conceive to be a grievance, their cauſe would be diſhonoured by violence.

Let ſuch be the conduct of Proteſtant Diſſenters, and they will act with the obedience of good ſubjects, and the dignity and firmneſs of men.

CIVIS.

Dec. 24, 1792.

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